

PLANNING A TRIP TO SRI LANKA...?

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How much would I expect to pay for accommodation and would you be able to recommend somewhere?

A. For volunteers, simple guest house accommodation starts from around 600+ SLR per night or 15'000 SLR per month for longer stays. This is for quite basic accommodation, with cold water (although hot water is not really needed out here!). If you wanted to stay somewhere with a small kitchen etc you may pay closer to 20,000 SLR. If there are other volunteers out here at the same time you may have the option to share a small house (houses can range from 15,000 through to 50,000++ depending on their location etc). For visiting teachers there is a wide range of accommodation available; guesthouses ranging from budget through to high end, cabanas on the beach as well as hotels. We are happy to recommend a selection of places depending on your requirements and to book your chosen accommodation on your behalf.

Please note that prices are correct at time of writing but are subject to change and may vary depending on the time of year and guesthouse availability.

Q. Will ASL pay for my accommodation?

A. No. ASL Volunteers must fund their own living expenses.

Q. Will the accommodation have electricity?

A. Yes you will definitely have electricity although power cuts are quite regular so it is always useful to have a small torch that you can carry with you.

Q. Do I need to bring adaptors for any electrical equipment?

The electricity supply works on the same voltage as the UK and Australia, however, most sockets are round pin as apposed to square pin. You can bring adaptors from home if you have them but they are also widely available in Sri Lanka and very cheap to buy.

Q. Will I need a mosquito net and other items to protect me from mosquitos?

Most guesthouses have mosquito nets as a standard feature so you will not need to bring one with you. It is always recommended to bring a good quality mosquito repellent from home as the range is very limited in Sri Lanka. Depending on your location, you may wish to consult your doctor about malaria protection, although ASL's projects do not currently operate in malaria zones.

Q. What items do you recommend that I bring with me that are not available or hard to find in Sri Lanka?

A. You can contact us if you have any specific items you'd like to check on but here are some common items that should be brought from home:

- Good quality mosquito repellent
- Good quality sunscreen
- Tampons (only pads are available)
- If you need AA batteries for your camera it advisable to bring a pack from home as batteries here degrade in the heat and are not very good quality.
- After bite!

Q. Where in Sri Lanka is your organisation based?

A. We are based in the south (Head Office in Galle and one regional office in Tangalle). Any position with ASL would be southern based. Our address in Galle is 32/5 Lower Dickson Road, Galle.

Q. What documents do I need to complete to register as a volunteer with ASL?

A. You will need to complete and sign the ASL Volunteer Agreement Form and provide a scanned copy of the data page of your passport, a passport size photo and insurance details. We also need a current CRB or Police Check to enable you to work directly with children. This is part of our Child Protection Policy and all staff and volunteers must produce this.

ASL is registered with an umbrella organisation DDC (Due Diligence Checking) who can coordinate a CRB check for a fee of 16 GBP for volunteers. If you want to check them out you can visit <http://www.ddc.uk.net/> All we have to do is provide details online of your role and contact details and then an application pack will be posted to you. Once you have lodged your application it will take approximately 35 days to get the CRB check posted out.

You will also be required to read and adhere to our Child Protection Policy and Volunteer Guidelines. All documents can be downloaded from our website.

Q. As a volunteer is there any funding available?

A. All ASL volunteers must be self-funded and cover the costs of their flights, visas, food and accommodation. Any approved work expenses and work related travel can be reimbursed at the end of each month. We do not charge a fee for your time with us.

Q. Does ASL charge a fee for volunteers?

A. No! Unlike many organisations ASL will not charge volunteers any administrative fees for the time they spend on our projects. However, donations that contribute directly towards the schools and communities we support are greatly appreciated.

Q. What type of visa should I apply for and can you help me?

A. Please seek advice from ASL by email before applying for a visa.

Q. How do I get from the airport to the south of Sri Lanka and how much will it cost?

A. The easiest way to travel directly from the airport is by mini van. A pick up from the airport to Galle will be between 6500-7000 SLR and to Tangalle 11500 SLR. It is normal custom to buy the driver something to eat if you stop for snack on the journey. We can arrange for a driver to be waiting at the gates with a signboard bearing your name.

Much cheaper options include taking the train or a bus from Colombo however this may require an overnight stay in the city depending on your arrival time as the airport is 35km north of Colombo itself.

Please note that if you are traveling to Tangalle the train line terminates at Matara and you will need to catch a bus for the last hour of your journey. You will need to check on the train times as they are not very frequent, however buses depart every 15 minutes or so.

Q. Will my ATM and credit cards work in Sri Lanka?

A. Yes, ATMs are common in major towns such as Galle and Tangalle. Only the larger hotels and guesthouses will accept credit cards so it is best to check on this before arrival.

Q. Is it possible to give me a rough estimation of costs per week?

A. The cost of living will greatly depend on how you live. For example if you travel by local buses it is much cheaper than traveling by tuk tuk or van (15 rupees for a bus from Unawatuna to Galle compared to 300 by tuk tuk for the same 7km journey).

Eating rice and curry lunch packets is much cheaper than tourist restaurants (100 rupees for a rice and curry local lunch packet compared to 500-800 for a restaurant meal). Local breakfasts (or items from a bakery) can start from as low as 15 rupees. Fruit and vegetables are very cheap, but if you shop in the supermarkets and buy items in jars, cans, processed items they are much higher. It is best to avoid imported items except as a special treat!

Q. What type of clothing should I wear when working in schools?

A. When working in schools or in local communities our staff and volunteers are required to dress conservatively and neatly. Shorts, skirts or trousers should cover the thighs and knees. Ladies please, no strappy tops (avoid showing shoulders in schools), avoid tops showing any cleavage or that are too figure hugging. Light loose cotton clothing is recommended due to the heat. It is no problem to wear sandals or 'neat' flip flops to work. Gentlemen smart T-shirts are ok but polo shirts and cotton collared shirts are better. Please remember you will be representing ASL so we ask you always to appear neat and professional and never wear clothing with offensive slogans or pictures!.

If you are heading for a tour to the hill country it is advisable to bring with you a couple of pieces of warmer clothing as it can be a lot cooler especially at night. A sweater or cardigan is recommended.

Q. What inoculations will I need to get before traveling to Sri Lanka and will I need to take malaria medication?

A. Please check with your doctor or practice nurse well in advance of traveling. Malaria is not common in the south of Sri Lanka and it is unusual for travelers to take malaria medication. Dengue Fever can sometimes be contracted from mosquitoes in Sri Lanka so it is always advisable to take precautions to protect you from mosquito bites. We recommend that you make any medical decisions for yourself only after consulting with your doctor.

Q. What medical supplies should I bring?

Most items you may need are available from the local pharmacies. A selection of different sized plasters might come in handy as it seems that one size fits all here!

Q. I would like to bring some presents for the school I will be working with/visiting. What should I bring?

A. Please discuss this with your Field Officer prior to your visit and allow adequate time to conduct a needs assessment within the school. Rather than bringing funds with you from abroad, please use our regular donation channel or let our Field Officers know if they can assist in purchasing items with you while in Sri Lanka. Please note that there is a large range of stationery items such as books, pens, etc. for sale in Sri Lanka and you might find it cheaper and logistically easier to purchase these items once you are in the country. Our Field Officers will be happy to assist. English learning materials will benefit the children greatly

and will have a positive long-term impact at your TWIN school (please ask beforehand what facilities your school has, to avoid bringing things like CD-Roms to a school which hasn't got a computer).

Presents which are often appreciated include pictures of your home town/school/friends, letters, art work (which will most likely be decorating the class room for many years to come), photos/paintings of your native animals and plants, maps of your home country. The children and teachers will be very interested in learning more about the country you come from and your customs and beliefs.

Shipping items from abroad to Sri Lanka can be very costly and AdoptSriLanka can not take on the responsibility of collecting these items from customs in Colombo and delivering them to your school. Discuss this with your Field Officer as quite often it will be cheaper to organise purchasing items from Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan teachers often request copies of your curriculum or lesson plans and activities. These items will be highly valued if you are able to bring them from your country.

Q. Are there any local customs I should be aware of?

Always use your right hand when eating, handing over a gift/plate of food, pointing or shaking hands with people.

You may have moments of confusion when witnessing the 'Sri Lankan head wobble' which resembles our head shake for 'no' but actually means 'yes' or 'ok' in Sri Lanka.

Children may kneel in front of you and place their heads to the ground as a blessing and sign of respect. If this happens, touch them lightly on their head with your right hand before they rise.

Western concepts of privacy are little understood in Sri Lanka whose culture is based on extended family groupings and closely knit village societies. Natural curiosity usually expresses itself in the form of endless repeated questions, most often "Where are you going?" closely followed by "What is your country?" and "What is your name?" It is important to stay polite and remember how potentially negative an impact any rudeness or impatience on your part will have on perceptions of foreigners.

Do not be surprised if people comment on your age or weight or marriage status. Being told you are 'fat' is normally not considered an insult and in fact is often meant as a compliment!

If you are visiting with your partner please be aware that overt physical displays of affection in public are frowned upon.

Q. Are there any religious customs I should be aware of?

The majority religion in Sri Lanka is Buddhism (69.1%) but Hinduism (7.1%), Christianity (6.2%) and Islam (7.6%) is practiced by many.

In Buddhist schools you might find a shrine or an image of Buddha. Never have yourself photographed with a Buddha image (i.e. with your back to the image). It is ok to take photographs of people facing towards Buddha or of the statue alone.

Every full moon day in Sri Lanka is a public holiday (Poya Day). People will normally visit temples on this day and worship Buddha. They may take along offerings of fresh flowers, incense or coconut oil lamps. Alcohol is not normally sold on Poya Days and many Buddhists refrain from eating meat on these days.

The colour of worship in Sri Lanka is white and people normally wear white when visiting a temple. Please always make sure you cover your shoulders and legs when visiting a temple and take off your shoes before entering.

Q. Is it OK to give out my personal contact details if asked?

Avoid giving your personal details such as home telephone number, email or address to students or teachers not directly involved in your TWINS link. This can sometimes encourage requests for individual financial assistance. If unsure, speak with your Field Officer and they can assist with forwarding on letters or emails to you.

Q. Is it expensive to use my mobile phone in Sri Lanka?

Check rates with your service provider at home before departure. We recommend that you buy a local sim card especially if you are volunteering and therefore in Sri Lanka for a month or more as these are very cheap and cost effective. Local calls and international calls will be a lot cheaper if using a local sim card.

Q. Should I bring my laptop?

If you are volunteering and helping us out in the office a laptop is very useful as ASL has limited computer resources (especially in the Galle office). Priority must always go to the local staff. Laptops can also be very useful for home entertainment; playing games, listening to music and watching films. DVD's are cheap in Sri Lanka although depending on where you are based the variety and quality are not always good.